ARTICLE

TRANSLATING FASCISM IN PORTUGAL: MAINSTREAM DAILIES AND AUTHORITARIAN STABILISATION (1922–1928)

Traduzindo o fascismo em Portugal: Imprensa generalista e estabilização autoritária (1922–1928)

Traducir el fascismo en Portugal: Prensa generalista y estabilización autoritaria (1922-1928)

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses how authoritarian 'stabilisation' became publicly thinkable in Portugal from 1922 to 1928 via a connected press. Using *Diário de Notícias* and *O Século* as primary sources (1922–1928) and the Italian *Corriere della Sera* as an external counterpoint, it reconstructs the framings through which Italian fascism circulated as a repertoire of order, discipline, and executive insulation. This study shows that regime change hinged less on activist minorities than on shifts within mainstream arenas of legitimacy targeting urban literate audiences. It argues that repeated press narration normalised exceptional solutions as national 'corrections', facilitating the passage from parliamentary crisis to dictatorship and foreshadowing Salazar's consolidation.

KEYWORDS: Fascism, Democratisation, Portugal, Press, Authoritarianism, Interwar period.

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa como a "estabilização" autoritária se tornou publicamente pensável em Portugal entre 1922 e 1928 por meio de um campo jornalístico conectado. Usando *Diário de Notícias* e *O Século* como fontes primárias (1922–1928), e o *Corriere della Sera* como contraponto externo, reconstrói os enquadramentos pelos quais o fascismo italiano circulou como repertório de ordem, disciplina e blindagem do Executivo. O estudo mostra que a mudança de regime dependeu menos de minorias ativistas do que de deslocamentos nas arenas mainstream de legitimidade dirigidas a públicos urbanos letrados. Sustenta que a repetição narrativa na imprensa normalizou soluções excepcionais como "correções" nacionais, facilitando a passagem da crise parlamentar à ditadura e antecipando a consolidação de Salazar.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Fascismo, Democratização, Portugal, Imprensa, Autoritarismo, Entre-guerras.

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza cómo la "estabilización" autoritaria se volvió públicamente pensable en Portugal entre 1922 y 1928 mediante un campo periodístico conectado. A partir del uso de *Diário de Notícias* y *O Século* como fuentes primarias (1922-1928), y el *Corriere della Sera* como contrapunto externo, se reconstruye los encuadres mediante los cuales el fascismo italiano circuló como un repertorio de orden, disciplina y blindaje del Poder Ejecutivo. Este estudio muestra que el cambio de régimen dependió menos de minorías activistas que de desplazamientos en las arenas *mainstream* de legitimidad dirigidas a públicos urbanos letrados. Se sostiene que la repetición narrativa en la prensa normalizó soluciones excepcionales como "correcciones" nacionales, facilitando el paso de la crisis parlamentaria a la dictadura y anticipando la consolidación de Salazar.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Fascismo, Democratización, Portugal, Prensa, Autoritarismo, Periodo de entreguerras.

Introduction

By the autumn of 1922, the parliamentary order that had defined the political horizon of liberal Europe for the better part of a century was no longer failing in its margins alone. Its strains were structural and broadly shared: governments fell faster than they could be formed, electorates expanded beyond the capacity of institutions to absorb them and the war—which had in part been waged in the name of democratic civilisation—had returned a generation of men to societies that seemed less capable of self-government than before the first shots were fired. What the March on Rome made visible in October of that year was not the invention of a new politics so much as the crystallisation of an already widespread conviction that parliaments had exhausted their capacity to hold together the social order. Such conviction spread because the anxieties that sustained it were not peculiarly Italian: they belonged to a grammar of fears—of mass irruption, of legislative paralysis, of national dissolution—that could be recognised, translated and put to local use wherever the distance between democratic promise and institutional performance had grown wide enough to discredit the former in the name of the latter.

Portugal was one such case, and, in certain respects, a revealing one. The Republic proclaimed in 1910 and constitutionally settled in 1911 had staked its legitimacy on a programme of national modernisation and secular emancipation, yet it had never resolved the tension between the universality of that programme and the narrowness of the political community effectively called upon to sustain it (Almeida, 2011). José Pereira de Sampaio, writing in the Porto daily *Diário da Tarde* on 11 February 1911 under the pseudonym Sampaio Bruno, had given this tension a formula that proved more durable than the polemic that occasioned it: '*República dos 20 por cento*' [Republic of the 20 per cent]—a republic whose operative sovereignty rested on the literate minority, whereas the vast majority of the population remained outside the boundaries of active political life. The phrase named a structural condition not a passing deficiency: a democratising language of national sovereignty coexisting with institutional and cultural brakes on mass inclusion so that political modernity arrived accompanied by a fear of what full participation might release (Leal, 2008; Pereira, 2019). This study takes the tension between an expansive horizon and a logic of containment as a point of departure to explain how an authoritarian solution became publicly thinkable in Portugal during the 1920s and why that shift hinged on the repositioning of the arenas in which legitimacy was negotiated.

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Historiography has often approached the First Republic through two complementary emphases (Lopes, 2011). One foregrounds exclusion as an operative principle. Pereira's account stresses a persistent gap between republican claims and the practical narrowing of political membership, sustained by distrust of the 'uncultured' majority and by the conviction that government should remain in the hands of 'organised minorities' (Pereira, 2019). From this angle, the 'Republic of the 20 per cent' designates not only the numerical contraction of the electorate but a qualitative redefinition of the political nation: consent becomes legible above all through the approval of urban, literate audiences, treated as the decisive proxy for the will of the nation (Pereira, 2019). A second emphasis locates fragility in institutional design and the resilience of clientelist political forms. Leal highlights an 'atypical' parliamentarism, weak stabilising mechanisms and the chronic executive turnover that eroded confidence in parliamentarism as a workable technology of government (Leal, 2008; 2017b). Although they differ in causal accent, these readings converge on an implication that is central for what follows: when legitimacy is narrowed to literate urban constituencies while governance remains unstable, regime change turns less on activist minorities than on whether the mainstream arenas that certify public legitimacy continue to recognise the republican solution as viable.

The post-war conjuncture sharpened this problem (Adinolfi, 2005). The end of the Great War intensified expectations of representation while multiplying the perceived costs of democratisation—expanded claims, organized labour, inflation and social dislocation—within a political field strained by executive fragility (Leal, 2017a). In this setting, fears circulated with particular force: fears of disorder, strikes and 'maximalist' mobilisation, and the international repercussion of 1917 as a repertoire through which domestic conflict could be narrated as existential threat (Meneses, 2024; Rosas, 1998). Yet this study wages that these anxieties became politically consequential only when they were rendered respectable and administratively intelligible in the places in which legitimacy was produced—places that were not reducible to cabinets, parties, or conspiratorial groups but were materially embedded in the public sphere (Adinolfi, 2009). Pereira is explicit on this point: the press was not a neutral backdrop but an actor that shaped political structure and the formation of republican and post-republican legitimacy (Pereira, 2019). The question, then, is not whether fears existed but how they were translated into a persuasive vocabulary of 'stabilisation' that could reorient those audiences that once had anchored republican horizons. In other words, the problem is to reconstruct the work of public translation through which 'order' became a respectable solution rather than a merely coercive wish.

This is where this study positions its contribution. Studies of the Republic's collapse have richly mapped institutional instability, restricted participation and the coalitions that facilitated the coup of 28 May 1926 (Leal, 2008; Rosas, 1998). They have also identified the wider interwar drift towards authoritarian solutions and have crucially insisted that the Portuguese dictatorship cannot be reduced to a derivative imitation of Italian fascism (Pinto, 2021) even as the Italian case supplied a repertoire whose meanings could be selectively appropriated within Portuguese debates. What remains less closely reconstructed is the concrete mechanism of mediation through which authoritarian repertoires became readable, acceptable and finally plausible to mainstream audiences whom had previously been addressed in constitutional and parliamentary idioms. The historiography gives us the structural tension named by Bruno and the political outcome analysed by Pereira, Leal and Rosas; it leaves room to examine the public work that connected those poles in real time at the level of framing language and everyday political intelligibility.

To grasp how a change in political language became possible within the Portuguese urban public sphere in the mid-1920s, our primary sources are *Diário de Notícias* and *O Século*, read in series from 1922 to 1928. These were mass, generalist dailies that targeted urban middle-class, literate and professional audiences, the milieus whose opinions mattered most in the cities as a daily arena of political validation (Cabrera; Lima, 2022; Lima; Sousa, 2020). *Diário de Notícias* built its profile around an informational register and a claim to factual narration, presenting a public account oriented to the city and (by extension) to a widening readership shaped by urban reading habits (Lima; Sousa, 2020, Miranda, 2002;). *O Século* (born with an explicitly republican vocation before becoming a highly successful mass newspaper) remained closely attuned to civic expectations linked to republican and constitutional horizons in the late monarchy and the transition to 1910 (Cabrera; Lima, 2022; Lima; Sousa, 2020). Precisely because these newspapers were compatible in different ways with the earlier democratising impulse of the Republic, they are particularly useful for observing how, under instability and censorship pressures, a grammar of fears could solidify within mainstream audiences and make a repertoire of national 'salvation' and stabilisation seem plausible beyond activist minorities (Cabrera; Lima, 2022; Pereira, 2019). Read serially, they enable us to track the normalisation of categories— 'stabilisation', 'salvation', 'discipline'—through which exceptional authority could be presented as public necessity. Alongside the two Lisbon dailies, this study also uses the Italian *Corriere della Sera* as an external counterpoint—not to shift the focus away from Portugal but to add a contemporary vantage point from a major liberal newspaper writing in a political landscape already reshaped by fascism— to thus assess

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whether the Portuguese emerging authoritarian trajectory emerged as a subordinate echo or as a cognate solution recognisable within a wider European drift towards executive insulation and anti-parliamentary remedies (Pinto, 2021).

On this basis, this study asks how *Diário de Notícias* and *O Século* (from Mussolini's appointment on 30 October 1922 to the early consolidation of the Portuguese dictatorship culminating in Salazar's entry into government as Minister of Finance on 27 April 1928) rendered authoritarian 'stabilisation' publicly legible within a public sphere shaped by restricted participation and institutional volatility (Leal, 2017b; Pereira, 2019). It further asks what the *Corriere della Sera*'s coverage suggests about the relational dimension of this process: whether Portugal was read as an importer of an Italian solution or as an autonomous participant in a broader European drift towards executive insulation (Pinto, 2021). The working hypothesis of this study states that regime transition became feasible when mainstream arenas of public legitimacy—especially those addressing urban literate and professional audiences—shifted from interpreting republican instability as remediable within constitutional horizons to framing it as a condition that required exceptional authority.

This study proceeds in two steps, the first of which traces the Portuguese reception of the March on Rome and the early ambiguity of fascism as a parliamentary solution to socialist advance, reconstructing how order, discipline, and executive insulation entered mainstream categories of evaluation. The second step follows the 28 May 1926 coup through its initially leaderless aftermath, examining how 'stabilisation' was narrated, contested and gradually anchored up to Salazar's appointment while the Italian press registered Portugal as part of the interwar search for authoritative remedies. In doing so, this study shifts its analytical focus from diffusion to co-construction: the emergence of an intelligible authoritarian repertoire through reciprocal watching, naming, and normalising within the public sphere.

Portugal in the Aftermath of the March on Rome

On 29 October 1922, *O Século* appointed Francisco da Cunha Leal—a Nationalist Republican linked to the Sidonist interlude of 1917–18—as director[1]. The choice signalled a certain estrangement from liberal parliamentarism and a growing receptiveness to the rhetoric of authority. Leal's criticism of the republican regime was evident from his very first editorial, which showed that he had maintained a strongly critical attitude towards the First Republic since the Sidonist period[2]. He further argued that Portugal, echoing what he saw as a growing public mood, required a 'reaction': not a replication of Mussolini but a bid to save

the Republic—if necessary beyond constitutional limits—by breaking parliamentary paralysis and restoring order against the 'plutocracy'.

From the mid-1920s onwards, after the initial enthusiasms, the democratic dream that had animated Europe in the immediate aftermath of the war was already in deep crisis. In Portugal, as elsewhere, the institutions of the First Republic appeared fragile, incapable of undertaking the restructuring demanded by the Great War. In Italy, Mussolini's government seemed to offer a precedent: still formally a coalition of Catholics and liberals yet able to suppress strikes, marginalise socialist parties and enforce economic discipline. The press, more than a mere channel of information, became the arena in which the Italian case was translated, reframed and invested with meanings suited to Portugal. Thus, following its narratives is grasping how authoritarian solutions were rendered plausible: not as abstract doctrines but as concrete answers to the spectre of parliamentary paralysis and social unrest. In the editorial of 2 November 1922, published in the immediate aftermath of the March on Rome, *O Século* clearly outlined the position it was to pursue in the years ahead. Mussolini's accession to power was interpreted as the inevitable consequence of the failures of previous Italian governments and as a decisive barrier against communism and revolutionary syndicalism. *O Século* further downplayed the violence attributed to fascism, framing it as the product of individual acts rather than systemic brutality. In this way, the newspaper implicitly invited parallels with Portugal, where similar concerns about governmental weakness and social unrest were at stake[3]. *Diário de Notícias* also observed the Italian case with interest, though articulated in a markedly different register from that of *O Século*. If the latter insisted on the inevitability of rupture, *Diário* framed the March on Rome as a 'national revolution, bloodless yet epic, truly Garibaldian'[4], the outcome of an alliance with the monarchy and of the 'iron discipline' imposed by Mussolini on his followers. The point of emphasis was not the polemical necessity of revolt but the orderly and patriotic discipline through which power had been seized. Thus, although both newspapers portrayed fascism as the remedy to parliamentary impotence, they diverged in the idiom through which legitimacy was constructed: *O Século* by evoking the inevitability of insurrection, *Diário* by extolling the virtues of cohesion and national spirit. *Diário* sought to convey a single message—consciously or otherwise—through foreign and domestic coverage, even where the two might appear at first sight to be distinct and non-overlapping. Accordingly, on the day it reported Mussolini's rise to power, it placed alongside it an editorial tellingly entitled *Ordem pública*, devoted to the Portuguese situation. The juxtaposition was hardly innocent: the Italian 'bloodless revolution' was invoked less as a foreign curiosity than as a point of comparison, a mirror in which the

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Portuguese disorder could be reflected. The editorial's call for an '*ardente aspiração de resurgimento nacional*' suggested that what Mussolini had achieved in Italy—restoring public order and national unity—might equally well serve as a model for a country still mired in instability (Diário de Notícias, 8 nov. 1922: 1).

The point, then, is not whether Portugal did or did not 'mimic' Italy. After all, the Sidónio Pais episode shows that, in certain respects, Portugal could even anticipate developments later associated with Italy. What matters is to observe how ideas circulated between Italy and Portugal and, against the background of an emerging corporatist dictatorship, intermingled and overlapped on several planes—planes that must be kept in relation to one another if we are to grasp how these ideas were able to diffuse (Leal, 2008). On 20 March, the programme manifesto of the Union of Economic Interests (UIE) had been published on two pages under the eloquent title *União dos Interesses Económicos ao Paíz* (Union of Economic Interests for the Country), which sought to politically justify the creation of the Union of Economic Interests[5]. According to the UIE, government had to be insulated from popular pressure, to rally the 'living forces of the nation' around it and to implement a programme of strict economic restructuring. This, in turn, required the abolition of class conflict and the conclusion of a pact in defence of national interests. In essence, what was being advocated was the transformation of Portugal into a corporatist regime[6]. The UIE's strategy was twofold: on the one hand, to participate in elections with its own party capable of lobbying within Parliament and, on the other, to prepare the ground for an authoritarian turn. On 16 April 1925, the front page of *O Século* carried an article by Cunha Leal entitled *O momento politico* (Leal, 1925: 1), which openly called for a revolt against the Democratic Party[7]. Golpe dos Fifis (with which Cunha Leal's name was associated) took place two days later. The newspaper, accused of supporting the rebel army and of having encouraged its aims through a preventive campaign, was suspended for several weeks on the grounds of anti-democratic propaganda. The government's accusation rested on solid grounds for the UIE had mounted a sustained attack on the institutions in those columns.

Although the risk to the government was considerable on this occasion, repression of the coup plotters was strikingly mild. Soon afterwards, the UIE was able to present its representatives in the legislative elections of that same year and, with the support of *O Século*, to promote its candidates. The outcome, however, was meagre: only four deputies were elected. To read the issues for those months is to encounter a portrait of a country poised on the edge of upheaval, menaced by the spectre of a revolution said to be financed from Moscow and made even more vivid by the UIE's electoral defeat[8]. The projected image was that of a continent on the verge of succumbing to a communist revolution and of a colonial empire

poised to implode. For the UIE and for *O Século* which gave it voice, the spectre of Bolshevism served as a convenient instrument with which to delegitimise the fragile Portuguese democracy—already vulnerable in a country in which scarcely ten per cent of its population enjoyed the franchise. At the same time, the invocation of colonial crisis struck at the heart of government policy, which had sought to stabilise the empire by granting greater administrative autonomy to its overseas territories (Garcia, 2017). Thus, the language of anti-communism was made to converge with anxieties over empire, reinforcing a broader climate of fear: the 'terror' not of revolution alone but of democracy itself[9].

The coup d'état of 18 April was no isolated eruption but left behind it a trail of disarray that exposed a government increasingly incapable of governing. In its aftermath, even *Diário de Notícias* moved decisively towards pro-authoritarian positions, abandoning the republican authorities to their weakness. The two leading newspapers now stood virtually aligned in a concerted offensive against the main government party, denouncing it for its inability to confront the deepening economic crisis and for its excessive indulgence towards the demands of the working class. Always a moderate newspaper, *Diário de Notícias* avoided the inflammatory language of *O Século*. However, this moderation did not mean that the attack on parliamentary democracy was any less violent than that unleashed for years by *O Século*. In this climate, the parliamentary elections of 8 November 1925—the last of the First Republic—combined unprecedented mobilisation (71 per cent turnout) with intense delegitimisation (Pereira, 2019). *Diário de Notícias* described the contest as little more than a 'joke' orchestrated by the Democratic Party[10], whereas contemporaries pointed to 'widespread electoral fraud', with the Democratic Left reduced to six deputies and one senator. The election also registered the direct political intervention of the UIE, which secured six seats in the Chamber of Deputies and three in the Senate, as well as the defeat of António de Oliveira Salazar, standing for the Portuguese Catholic Centre in Arganil. Rather than stabilising the regime, this final electoral act unfolded amid radicalisation and institutional instability, helping to clear the ground for the military coup of May 1926. It was within this framework of hollow democracy that the Moagem group advanced its solution to the economic crisis: a Darwinian restructuring of the productive system around a handful of 'healthy' industries, allowing the weakest to collapse. Given the grave social consequences that such a programme would have entailed, the conclusion was unavoidable: it could only be imposed by a strong executive, one not constrained (at least in principle) by the pressures of public opinion. The Portuguese state, however, was deemed insufficiently reliable to carry out such an ambitious reform project (Telo, 1994). The shift in Moagem's stance—towards a markedly more radical opposition to the government—was

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rooted in the economic crisis of 1925, and the editorial line of *Diário de Notícias* gave expression to this new current of thought in the country.

Against this background of instability and of a press increasingly mobilised against republican parliamentarism, it is necessary to return to how *Diário de Notícias* continued to frame the Italian case. The point is not only the initial sympathy for Mussolini but the fact that this tone persisted as the regime's authoritarian features became clearer. Instead, *Diário de Notícias* reinforced the translation of fascism as a repertoire of order and 'stabilisation' through two mediators hosted in its pages: António Ferro and Rome correspondent Enrico Tedeschi. Tedeschi edited the column *Carta de Roma*, and the choice to grant visibility to so openly partisan a voice suggests an editorial willingness—at least within sections of its foreign coverage—to accommodate a language of proximity towards the regime. It must be remembered that fascism could never be imported into Portugal in its entirety: Mussolini's revisionist foreign policy and colonial ambitions rendered it incompatible with the priorities of Lisbon. Tedeschi accordingly muted its more revolutionary features, choosing instead to portray fascism above all as a regime of order. For many Portuguese, Mussolini was indeed the statesman who had restored authority and suppressed years of unrest, but he also embodied a latent menace: his colonial ambitions were well known, and any alteration of the status quo risked undermining Portuguese rule overseas. In this light, the preservation of empire seemed to require not an expansionist programme (the hallmark of Italian fascism) but a strategy of internal consolidation and international stability. It was precisely to reassure Portuguese anxieties that Tedeschi published his interview with Dino Grandi, significantly entitled *Receios infundados* (Unfounded fears). There, Grandi insisted that the shared experience of fighting side by side in the Great War had only deepened the bonds of mutual esteem between Italy and Portugal, dismissing as 'perfidiously disseminated rumours' any suggestion of Italian designs upon Portuguese 'flourishing colonies'[12]. In this respect, the press played a crucial role in preparing the transition towards authoritarian rule through a slow, cumulative dissemination of conservative ideas in literature and periodicals. This cultural work helped to create a receptive terrain for the nationalism later pursued by Estado Novo and it illustrates how newspapers and journals could shape a new political vision, circulate it widely and secure the degree of acceptance required for its eventual consolidation (Pereira, 2019).

The Military Coup of 28 May 1926

On 28 May 1926, the Portuguese military coup brought down the First Republic and opened a transition towards authoritarian rule that differed sharply from the Italian

trajectory. As Fernando Rosas has underlined, the coalition that sustained *pronunciamento* rested on what he calls a 'minimum programme': a tactical platform broad enough to gather 'maximum support' but too vague to predefine an institutional future. Its central point of convergence was the determination to end the Democratic Party's monopoly of power, denounced as corrupt and demagogic. It also invoked in general terms a 'regime of order' or 'exception' meant to 'regenerate' the nation, while also promising financial stabilisation and economic recovery in both the metropole and the colonies (Rosas, 1998). Precisely because this programme remained ambiguous, it could momentarily align forces ranging from republican left currents to fascist right groupings, even if their visions of what should follow were profoundly divergent (Rosas, 1998). This setting had neither charismatic leader, mass organisation nor a party on the Italian model capable of structuring power. Initially, May 28 functioned as a heterogeneous point of convergence built around the conspiratorial military sector that recognised Mendes Cabeçadas as its figurehead and formalised itself in the proclamation of *Junta Revolucionária de Lisboa*. Yet, that convergence soon fragmented itself, and after June 17,1926, the process took an 'irreversible' turn towards an anti-liberal authoritarian trajectory (Leal, 2008). The result was a markedly different context: an authoritarian transition the direction of which initially remained open and the longer-term configuration, would only later take a more settled form. The tone adopted by *Diário de Notícias* in the weeks preceding May 28 further suggests that the officers acted within a climate that was, at minimum, permissive and, in certain respects, favourable: politics was portrayed as having reached terminal confusion; the Democratic Party—as the only truly organised force—was said to have monopolised office for fifteen years; and the ostentatious public display of that dominance, relayed in exhaustive press reports, was held up as proof of an omnipotence incompatible with parliamentary life. Thus, a military intervention could be cast not as rupture but as a correction of a 'wrong course'[13]. What emerges from *Diário de Notícias* is a tone of relief at the end of the republican ruling class's hold on government—an attitude consistent with years of sustained criticism, yet newly sharpened by the event itself. In the first days after May 28, the paper described the movement as well received across a country 'tired of the life it had been forced to endure', and cast 'the dignity of the uniform' as a guarantee of the 'most superior' and 'most noble' kind[14]. A sense of continuity and even familiarity was perceptible in Italy as well. *Corriere della Sera* reported the events with evident satisfaction[15] and, in a tone close to that of *Diário de Notícias* and *O Século*, framed the insurgents' success as a national outcome rather than a party victory. In this reading, the Portuguese coup appeared not as a merely local episode but as another sign of the direction in which European politics seemed to be moving. Significantly,

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Corriere della Sera placed the event on its front page, relaying the news through intermediary channels. The dispatch described the revolt as fully successful across the country, identified General Gomes da Costa among its leading figures and reported the resignation of the outgoing cabinet alongside the formation of a new government under Mendes Cabeçadas (who, it noted, intended to keep the Navy portfolio). It also stressed the practical seizure of authority—military control over public services and transport—while reproducing the claim that the movement was 'republican' in character and aimed at a government 'on democratic bases', even as power shifted decisively towards a military-led solution[16]. In the follow-up coverage of Machado's resignation, the paper described the President's departure as the orderly closure of a constitutional cycle rather than the opening of an institutional vacuum: public order was said to be secured without violent clashes, and the formation of a cabinet was entrusted to Cabeçadas in a manner consistent with constitutional procedure. Machado's letter, reproduced in full, framed the handover as a transfer of executive powers 'in conformity with the Constitution', with the ministry expected to ensure the continuity of government. This study also noted, however, the first social counter-signals—above all the call for a general strike by labour organisations against the risk of a military dictatorship—while emphasising reports of an accommodation between Cabeçadas and Gomes da Costa that was designed to prevent rivalry between the northern and southern forces and thus to stabilise the new order[17].

When General Gomes da Costa formed his first government in 1926, *Diário de Notícias* devoted space to sketching the appointed ministers. It is here that Salazar begins to emerge as a discernible figure in the press narrative of the dictatorship. Proposed for the Finance portfolio, he was still relatively unknown to the wider public: a professor of economics at the University of Coimbra with a prior parliamentary passage as a deputy for the Portuguese Catholic Centre, familiar mainly within restricted academic, economic and business circles. The paper, rather than confining itself to a few identifying lines, went on to present—on its second page—a more detailed account of the reform programme associated with him. Salazar's proposed remedy for the crisis centred on strict limits on public expenditure and wage restraint, measures likely to be unpopular, yet closely aligned with the much-invoked project of a 'Darwinian' reorganisation of Portuguese firms that had been circulating in elite debates for some time and of which he was not the only advocate. In a coup that had not produced a single leader, the attention granted to Salazar is therefore revealing: *Diário de Notícias* was already singling out a technical profile as a possible axis of consolidation, suggesting that 'stabilisation' might come to be imagined less through charismatic command than through financial discipline and executive control (Matos, 2003).

In a context of acute instability shaped by an ongoing struggle for hegemony within the new ruling constellation, António Ferro met Mussolini for a second time in December 1926, now published by *Diário de Notícias* as a '*notável e importantíssima entrevista*' (December 6, 1926). Ferro had interviewed Mussolini earlier in the decade under sharply different conditions—reportedly in a tightly limited slot—whereas this longer piece is built as a full narrative performance and appears at a politically charged moment: in Italy the opposition had been effectively removed from parliamentary life in November 1926, and the regime was moving through the *leggi fascistissime* phase. In that context, the interview reads as a deliberately calibrated act of foreign-facing communication aimed at a Portuguese public inside an authoritarian transition that remained open-ended. Ferro foregrounds two Portuguese anxieties—imperial expansion and political penetration—and then turns them into a structured reassurance, describing fascism as discipline, restraint, and orderly mobilisation. Mussolini addresses the colonial fear first, enabling Ferro to transmit a categorical denial to Lisbon: the rumour of Italian designs on Angola is dismissed as 'absurd and ridiculous' and attributed to hostile actors' intent on manufacturing misunderstandings between Italy and countries it claims to esteem. The report then shifts from colonies to organisation. The *Fasci* abroad are presented as bodies bound by strict rules: they must respect local laws and customs, abstain from the politics of the host country and act as instruments for 'making Italy known' and sustain cohesion among Italians overseas rather than as vehicles of subversion. In Ferro's construction, what might be feared as expansionism is repackaged as a disciplined and legible form of national energy, compatible with international stability (Ferro, 1927). The key effect lies in the parallelism he engineers: Portuguese apprehension is treated as reasonable—indeed inevitable—yet rendered manageable once fascism is narrated as a regime capable of controlling its own militants and regulating its image abroad while seeking cordial relations with an emergent 'friendly' authoritarian setting[18].

During this uncertain period, even the *Diário de Notícias*'s support for the military dictatorship, seen as a possibility for regeneration after the political monopoly of the Democratic Party, was quite fluctuating and highly conditioned. Ferreira Dias, in particular, editorialist of *Diário de Notícias* and a leading member of the 'technocrats', expressed himself in very critical terms about the government's failed financial policy (Rosas, 1998). Ferreira went so far as to speak and write of a complete failure of the adopted economic strategies, a position that also represented a large part of the local economic elite, which was reorganising itself around its own programme and its own leading figures, among whom Salazar was assuming a position of great importance[19]. It seems almost obvious that Moagem imposed a price on the military

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in exchange for its support and took advantage of this to dictate its economic line through the columns of *Diário de Notícias*: reduction of public spending, abolition of laws restricting financial transactions, creation of a fund for bank debt[20]. Salazar, who had meanwhile been appointed chairman of the Tax Reform Commission, came up with a solution to the problems raised by Dias in *Diário de Notícias*. After a year of work, the commission drew up a draft bill that was clearly in line with what industrialists had been demanding for some time, the core of which was a reduction in most direct taxes and corporate taxes[21]. *Diário de Notícias* gave the Coimbra professor ample space and high praise, in a sense predicting a rising career within the government and pointing to him as one of the most prominent figures in the country[22]. Through the pages of *Diário de Notícias* we can read and interpret the editor's objectives and trace how core components of Salazar's propaganda strategy were in evidence even prior to the dictatorship. The image of a man devoted solely to the nation, an austere and thrifty technician, a brilliant yet modest personality, an impeccable politician above the fray, began to take shape.

In this context of Portuguese instability, the unfolding of events was not read in Italy as a simple, linear 'authoritarian turn' precisely because the formula through which the Military Dictatorship was consolidating power remained uncertain. After the first moments of approval in May 1926, the *Corriere della Sera*'s attention shifted towards a more anxious, involved register: what mattered was not only that Portugal had moved beyond parliamentary government, but that the direction, internal balance and durability of the new order were still unclear. It is in this light that the February 1927 revolt was granted unusual prominence. The uprising in Oporto was registered in Italy as more than a peripheral episode: it raised immediate concern about the stability of a regime increasingly perceived as a friendly point of reference on the shifting political map of Europe. *Corriere della Sera* treated the events with unusual prominence, first with a detailed report on February 9, 1927 and then with a further front-page follow-up as the repression unfolded. This double signalling suggests a watchful proximity: Portuguese authoritarian transition was being read in Italy as a matter of shared political direction and of strategic interest, not as distant news. Italy followed the Portuguese situation with renewed attention in mid-February 1927, reading the disturbances of February 9–13 as a serious test for a regime increasingly treated as 'friendly' and politically convergent. The press framed the restored calm as provisional and highlighted the government's emergency response—curfews, arrests, deportations and administrative purges—as instruments of 'stabilisation'. The mobilisation of republican opposition abroad, including the Paris-based Liga de Defesa da República ('Liga de Paris'), was described as a further sign

that the conflict was becoming organised and transnational. In this perspective, Portuguese instability mattered beyond Lisbon: it threatened to reopen a space of uncertainty in a country that, after May 1926, was entering the Italian horizon of sympathetic authoritarian transitions. After this moment of alarm, Italian coverage quickly shifted from the contingency of revolt to the longer-term meaning of the Portuguese transition. In the days that followed, *Corriere della Sera* began to describe Portugal not only as a country struggling to suppress dissent, but as a regime seeking an institutional formula capable of fixing authority beyond emergency rule. In this frame, 'stabilisation' was no longer described only through curfews, arrests, deportations, and purges, but also through the prospect of reorganisation 'on a corporative basis', explicitly discussed as the next horizon of the dictatorship. The emphasis fell on the language of reconstruction: a transitional dictatorship portrayed as conscious of its provisional character, preparing constitutional adjustments and legitimising itself through a claim to represent the 'healthy' forces of the nation—above all the army and organised economic interests—against party 'politicking' and republican factionalism. The suggestion was that the Portuguese case was moving towards a patterned solution already familiar in interwar Europe, in which the containment of conflict required a new architecture of representation and discipline rather than a return to parliamentary competition. *Corriere della Sera* returned to Portugal with a tone of palpable apprehension in August 1927, reporting an attempted coup in Lisbon that was described as a serious test of the regime's internal cohesion. The paper described the conspiracy as triggered by tensions at the top—Carmona's dual role and the appointment of Passos e Sousa—before recounting the dramatic intrusion into the Council of Ministers, the exchange of gunfire, and the abortive effort to impose a decree naming Filomeno Câmara dictator. The episode ended, it noted, with arrests and an officially restored calm.

By April 27, 1928, Salazar was a powerful presence: he agreed to enter Freitas's government as finance minister only on condition that he command the budgets of all ministries and hold a standing veto over any enlargement of expenditure. The professor from Coimbra had a conflicted relationship with the press, yet he never doubted its weight—least of all now that he stood at the centre of power. His sensitivity to the media was confirmed by the fact that, on the day of his appointment, the new minister summoned journalists to present his plan of action within the government in a carefully crafted speech. While it might seem normal for a newly appointed minister to want to inform the country about his programme through the press (especially when it concerned an important issue such as the economy), the way in which this was done seemed exceptional. None of this was accidental: Salazar fashioned

presence through restraint; his sparing, carefully staged appearances in the press lent his pronouncements greater force. From the outset he projected the image of a man fully aware of his mission, unwilling to be measured against the transience that had marked the succession of republican cabinets. In his inaugural address as Minister of Finance, he presented his mandate in terms of permanence and discipline[23]. From this moment onward, the authoritarian transition begins to take on a clearer direction: the dictatorship finds a leader capable of giving it coherence and one whose authority was already being received with marked goodwill in influential sectors of the press. In this way, thanks also to the understanding and support of *Diário de Notícias*, Salazar took on the characteristics of a true saviour of the country who, if listened to, would initiate a new renaissance for Portugal.

Conclusion

Italy and Portugal rarely occupied one another's foreground. Their geopolitical horizons scarcely overlapped; even as allies in the First World War, they fought on different fronts and moved within different strategic theatres. Yet the 1910s placed them inside a shared European moment: a decade marked by an expansive, almost tidal confidence in democratic legitimacy. In Portugal, the republican revolution of 1910 announced a new political grammar, with parliament and civic regeneration at its core. In Italy, the widening of suffrage in 1912 signalled a comparable entry into mass politics. In both settings, the promise of democratisation acquired an institutional shape and a public rhetoric that could be celebrated as the arrival of modernity.

The aftermath of the war altered that atmosphere. Inflation, shortages, labour mobilisation and the proliferation of street politics fed a sense that democratisation carried costs that the existing institutions struggled to absorb. The fears were not identical but were intelligible across borders: fear of parliamentary paralysis, of strikes and organised labour, that cabinet instability could become permanent, that mass participation might produce disorder rather than consent. In that climate, it was difficult for two European polities that had recently invested in democratic promises to ignore the emerging language of 'stabilisation'. The encounter between Italy and Portugal begins here: not through shared objectives overseas but by a shared problem-space at home.

The first glance came from Portugal in 1922, when Mussolini entered office at the head of a coalition government. In its early phase, the Italian experiment could still be read through categories that were yet to presuppose a settled dictatorship: government discipline, the restoration of public order, the containment of labour conflict and the promise of executive capacity

after years of perceived drift. That early legibility mattered for translation. It enabled Portuguese observers to treat Italy as an episode within a broader European argument over how to govern societies transformed by war and democratisation. Across the pages of *Diário de Notícias* and *O Século*, the March on Rome and the new cabinet were narrated less as an exotic phenomenon than as a sign that parliamentary routines could be suspended or reshaped in the name of order. Each newspaper spoke in its own register—one closer to moderation and national cohesion, the other more open to the rhetoric of rupture—yet both contributed to a widening frame in which authority, discipline and executive insulation emerged as plausible answers to the same anxieties that haunted Lisbon.

A second glance followed in 1926, when the Portuguese military coup brought down the First Republic. At that moment, the direction of the new Portuguese order remained unsettled, and this uncertainty became the object of Italian attention. The *Corriere della Sera*'s reporting registers something more than curiosity. Portugal begins to emerge as a nearby case within a European drift, a country whose instability carried meaning for the broader map of interwar politics. The coup could be celebrated as the end of a dysfunctional parliamentary monopoly, yet the absence of a charismatic leader and a mass party left the transition politically open. That openness produced an Italian gaze marked by vigilance: revolts, attempted coups, emergency measures, arrests, deportations and purges became the visible surface of a regime still searching for a durable formula.

In this mutual observation, the three newspapers form a coherent analytical field. *Diário de Notícias*, *O Século* and *Corriere della Sera* were not radicals speaking from the margins. They stood inside mainstream, broadly liberal traditions; *Corriere* carried a monarchic imprint, whereas *Diário de Notícias* belonged to a republican public sphere and *O Século* moved across shifting political and economic constellations. Their importance lies in that shared mainstream position. They could narrate exceptional solutions without presenting them as mere factional ruptures. Coups and authoritarian turns could be framed as national corrections, restorations of governability, remedies to parliamentary exposure. Through daily repetition, this press field helped to normalise a language in which stabilisation sounded like prudence and discipline, like civic necessity.

Thus, the encounter between the two countries unfolds as a slow process of recognition. Portugal first reads Italy as a repertoire of governmental techniques—coalition authority, the suppression of unrest, the promise of order—at a time when the future of fascism still seemed open to competing interpretations. Italy then reads Portugal as a testing ground of authoritarian consolidation, a friendly transition the fragility of which required attention,

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especially when disturbances threatened to reopen uncertainty. The point is not institutional mimicry. Their trajectories diverged, and the constraints of empire, domestic balance and political organisation shaped different outcomes. What converged was a political sensibility: the sense that democratisation had produced a crisis of governability, and that solutions might be found in forms of authority that could insulate the executive from disruptive pressures.

By the late 1920s, the Portuguese story also offered a figure who condensed this grammar into a person: Salazar, emerging not as a tribune of mass mobilisation but as a technician of fiscal discipline and endurance. His rise illustrates how stabilisation could shift from emergency rule to a claim of permanence. In that transformation, the press, rather than functioning as an external mirror, provided the vocabulary through which authority could be rendered acceptable, intelligible and even desirable. Seen from this angle, Italy and Portugal begin to 'smell' one another from afar because they are living through a shared European problem. The post-war crisis of democratic consolidation creates a space in which each country becomes for the other a case through which to think the costs of participation and the promises of order. The studied newspapers show that encounter in real time: an exchange of glances that turns into cautious, persistent watching as authoritarian solutions acquire public intelligibility on both shores of Europe.

Notes

1 Cunha Leal served as Minister of Finance from November 20, 1920, to March 2, 1921, and briefly again from November 15 to December 18, 1923. From 1921 to 1922 he also held the office of President of the Council of Ministers. He would later become one of the prominent parliamentary opponents of Salazar.

2 "O mal dos republicanos foi terem transformado o regime, por um estreito critério de sectarismo (…) Recomendamos portanto que se acalmem os nervos sobrexcitados, para que ninguém deixe de possuir de sustos irrefletidos" (O Século, 29 out. 1922: 1).

3 "O triunfo do fascismo é o assunto do dia (...) È cedo ainda para prever que consequências terá na existência política da Europa visto que o fascismo se apresentou, desde a primeira hora, como a barreira intransponível do comunismo e do sindicalismo revolucionário. (...) O fascismo triunfou por que os Governos anteriores não souberam salvar a Itália (…) a Itália inteira, de norte a sul, rejubila com a ascensão de Mussolini ao poder (…) As violências imputadas aos fascistas foram sempre actos individuais" (O Século, 2 nov. 1922: 1).

4 "Da revolução nacional, incruenta felizmente, mas épica, verdadeiramente garibaldina, pela qual o fascismo aliando-se com a monarquia, conseguiu alcançar o poder (...). Essa rapidez é

na verdade digna do espírito patriótico e da férrea disciplina que o sr. Mussolini soube impor aos seus partidários" (Diário de Notícias, 8 nov. 1922: 1).

5 "A causa única da formação da Uie foi a consciência de que o Paíz chegará de tal maneira delicada que, ou se unem todos aqueles que desejavam a continuidade pátria ou tudo resvalava para um abismo sem fundo" "União dos Interesses Económicos Ao Paíz" (Union of Economic Interests for the Country) (O Século, 20 mar. 1925: 5).

6 "Sustenta que, sendo o bem estar social uma resultante do equilíbrio de interesses solidários, nenhum Governo deve esquecer que a sua missão não é a de favorecer o domínio de uns sobre outros, mais apenas a de conciliar, com absoluta imparcialidade" (O Século, 20 mar. 1925: 5).

7 "Oxalá a nação, em resposta, não organize a sua própria política contra os partidos" (Leal, 1925: 1)

8 "A Yugoslavia, a Romania, a Suecia e Portugal são activamente trabalhados pelos agentes de Moscovo que não tardarão a desencadear perturbações neste País (...) e nós? Nós o que fazemos" (O Século, 28 maio 1925: 1)

9 "Qual é o aspecto e a acuidade com que atualmente essa crise se apresenta? O seu aspecto não pode ser pior. Em toda a colónia começa a gerar-se o desânimo económico e a revolta política" (O Século, 14 maio 1925: 1).

10 "Começa a burla eleitoral na organização dos recenseamentos que são feitos "ad hoc" para servirem uns em detrimento dos outros (...) No acto eleitoral intervem a autoridade por mil formas audaciosas as vezes também de forma violenta" (Diário de Notícias, 14 jul. 1925: 1).

11 "A causa nacional ora mais do que nunca posta em jogo exigia outra solução (...) Era de estimar que se pensasse um pouco mais na Pátria (...) na ausência desse espírito no Estado de desagregação nacional em que vivemos, a estrutura do poder executivo não pode apresentar características que não sejam determinadas pelo campo limitadíssimo de arranjos políticos" (Diário de Notícias, 2 ago. 1925: 1).

12 "Acho impossível que tão antiga e sincera amizade possa ser atenuada por tendenciosos rumores perfidamente divulgados, segundo os quais se pretendia atribuir à Itália certas miras imperialistas sobre as florescentes colônias de Portugal" (Diário de Notícias, 20 jun. 1926: 1).

13 "No campo político a confusão tem chegado aos últimos limites. O Partido Democrático é sem dúvida para ninguém o partido mais organizado do que existem no País. Pode dizer-se que nos últimos quinze anos vem monopolizando o poder. Tudo isto se faz ostensivamente e é comunicado ao País em extensos relatos de imprensa, para que ninguém possa ter dúvidas sobre a onipotência daquele organismo político" (Diário de Notícias, 5 abr. 1926: 1).

14 "Foi bem recebido o movimento por todo o País, cansado da vida que o obrigavam a sofrer; a dignidade da farda que o cobre é uma garantia das mais superiores e das mais nobres; merecem-nos todo o respeito os homens que compõem" (Diário de Notícias, 2 jun. 1926: 1).

15 "La rivolta ha trionfato in Portogallo. Dimissioni e nuovo Gabinetto" (Corriere della Sera, 31 maio 1926).

16 *Ibidem*

17 "Le dimissioni del Presidente Machado" (Corriere della Sera, 2 jun. 1926).

18 "Diga a Portugal que tudo quanto se tem dito acerca das absurdas pretensões de Italia sobre Angola é fantastico e ridículo!! Acentue-bem: fantástico e ridículo! Os inimigos do fascismo empenham-se, constantemente, em provocar mal-entendidos entre Itália e as nações que ela mais estima" (Ferro, 1926).

19 "Na hora grave que atravessamos; com os serviços públicos desorganizados, as finanças falidas e uma economia deficitária, só um plano integral que ataque a crise em todos os seus aspectos pode conseguir a regeneração do País" (Dias, 4 ago. 1926: 1).

20 "Com efeito, sem uma redução severíssima das despesas publicas (...), não há direito de exigir sacrifícios de qualquer natureza. (...) Impõe-se em seguida a suspensão dos diplomas que embaraçam a circulação económica, agravando o custo da vida tais como o imposto sobre o valor das transacções, a taxa complementar da contribuição industrial" (Dias, 4 ago. 1926: 1).

21 "Os que a comissão propõe que desapareçam são: a taxa anual da contribuição industrial, o imposto de rendimento, o imposto pessoal de rendimento, o imposto *ad valorem* o imposto sobre trespasses de estabelecimentos comerciais, o imposto sobre objectos artísticos, as taxas de inspecção ás indústrias e o imposto de aplicação dos capitais sobre os dividendos" (Diário de Notícias, 4 ago. 1926: 1).

22 "Hoje, apesar da modéstia do seu carácter o do horror inato que sente por tudo o que representa ostentação ou exibicionismo, umas das figuras de maior relevo na sociedade portuguesa" (Diário de Notícias, 12 jul. 1927: 1).

23 "Sei muito bem o que quero e para onde vou, mas não se me exija que chegue ao fim em poucos meses. Não quero mais, que o País estude, represente, reclame, discuta, mas que obedeça quando se chegar à altura de mandar", pronounced by Salazar on April 27, 1928, on the occasion of his appointment as Minister of Finance (Cf. Fonseca, 1966: 93-94).

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